

Individual Development Planning Guide

May 2010



Army 360 / Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) program is operated by the Center for Army Leadership, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Log onto MSAF at <https://msaf.army.mil> . For further information contact 913.758.3216 or 913.758.3160.



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Introduction

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."
-John F. Kennedy

It is natural to idolize leaders, imagining they know or have always known what to do and how to do it. Ask any leader, however, and they will probably tell you they got where they are by learning that is based on openness to new ideas and opportunities, evolves from experience into wisdom, is fast-tracked by the courage to try something new, and rises up through the humbling effects of adversity and failure. The key to leadership is the ability and willingness to continuously learn.

Why is continuous learning so important in the Army? It is because ongoing learning is the key to **agility, resilience, and sustained strength**.

Every soldier knows that each combat or operational situation is different. With conditions as unpredictable as those faced in combat, you can only know so much ahead of time. When you adopt the attitude of a life-long learner, you remain open to what there is to learn from your environment, experiences, and interactions. This responsiveness makes you agile so you can respond to the immediate by expanding what you know to include what you learn on-the-spot.

The world is becoming more complex every day and nowhere is that more evident than with the types of challenges you deal with. The ability to bounce back and not be beaten down by stress and strain is critical to soldiering. This resilience requires that you learn the strategies and tactics that worked for you in the past as well as what worked for others.

If there are whole units dedicated to building and maintaining your vehicles, don't you think there should be the same emphasis placed on building and maintaining you and your abilities? While a truck has to rely on the mechanic to maintain its effectiveness, your strength and effectiveness rely on how much you put into your maintenance and development. Consider the development process you are undertaking as your personal "maintenance crew." You are the Army's most important resource and continuous learning is essential to maintaining and sustaining the strength of your contribution.

What is an IDP?

Your Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a document created by you, for you, to guide your growth as a professional. You can create an IDP on your own or collaboratively with your supervisor, a trusted colleague, mentor, or coach. Your IDP is not a part of your performance evaluation. It is a tool for creating clear objectives for your professional development, stating concrete ways to achieve those results, and mapping part of your journey as a lifelong learner.

Introduction

You can go about creating an IDP in whatever way works best for you. Most IDPs include five basic steps.

1. **Clarification of what you want to develop or work on**, such as a specific leader behavior, achievement, attitude, or quality.
2. Identification of an **outcome** you hope to gain from your development efforts.
3. Identification of **specific activities** that will help you get to the outcomes.
4. A means to follow your **progress**.
5. Identification of the **resources** you will need and have available.

Why do an IDP?

If you have ever tried to master something such as acing an exam, completing a construction project, or mastering a new sport, you most likely discovered that you needed three things to be successful:

1. A desire or need to accomplish it.
2. A clear and specific target or result that signaled success.
3. A plan that concretely laid out the steps and activities to get you there.

Your IDP maps out this path, in your words, and with clearly defined actions to ensure continuous improvement and learning. The more you put into the IDP process, the more you will get out of it.

This guide will take you through a step-by-step process that will result in clarity about:

- What you should work on.
- What you can do to work on it.
- What will result from those efforts.

Many leaders start an IDP because they are told they need to do it. The good news is that leaders who take the process seriously, clearly targeting their development efforts, defining outcomes, and choosing the activities that will enable their success, find they greatly benefit from the process. The key is to “own” the process for yourself: make it something that is directly relevant to your experience and ambitions, and decide that you are doing this for yourself, not just because you were told to do it.

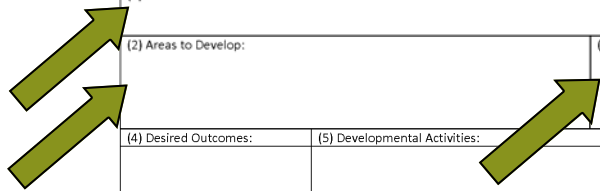
Step 1: Targeting Your Development

"There is nothing wrong with change if it is in the right direction."
-Winston Churchill

Every member of the Army, soldier or civilian, regardless of rank, grade, or level has ways they can improve. Improvement does not mean that you are necessarily bad at doing something. It means that because challenges and demands are constant, you need to continuously sharpen your skills and awareness to respond accordingly. Step 1 of the IDP process asks you to name a couple of areas to develop. An **area to develop** can be something you are already good at that you want to expand on, a skill you want to master, a habit to change, an attitude that needs to shift, or a challenge that asks you to step outside your comfort zone. An **area to develop** can also be something specific you want to accomplish. The more clear and concrete you are about what you want to work on, the easier it will be to identify what it will take to work on it. This part of the IDP process answers the question: *What should I work on to improve how I do my job, contribute to the mission, or build my professional future?*

The purpose of Step 1 is to complete Boxes 1-3 of the IDP form.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)		
(1) Leader's Name:		
(2) Areas to Develop:		(3) Supported Leader Competencies:
(4) Desired Outcomes:	(5) Developmental Activities:	(6) Progress Indicators:
(7) Resources and Logistics Needed:		
References: IFR, FM 6-22, Self Development Handbook, Development Improvement Guide, VIC		



There are two activities that will help you define **areas for development**:

1. Determining where you are now and your current capabilities.
2. Determining where you want to be, and what is important to focus on in your development process.

Step 1: Targeting Your Development

Where are you now?

The very first step in targeting your development efforts is to get clear about what you are good at already and what needs improvement. There are several ways to gather this information. You can use assessment instruments such as the Army's Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) instrument, feedback from others, self-observation of what you currently do and have done, and review of the results of your efforts and what others have said about you in the past.

The Army *Self-Development Handbook* provides many useful tips for gathering information on your capabilities.

TIP

When you ask for feedback from others, be sure to ask them to be as honest and direct as possible. The *Self-Development Handbook* provides additional tips on asking for feedback.

Use the boxes below to help you sort out your strengths and weaknesses. You can fill in strengths and weaknesses identified through a review of your Individual Feedback Report (IFR) from the MSAF, if you completed the assessment, and/or feedback and observations from your personal experience.

Strengths	Weaknesses

Step 1: Targeting Your Development

Where do you want to be?

Now that you have some idea of your strengths and weaknesses, you might want to consider how you will decide to focus your developmental efforts. The following questions can help you think about and clarify what you want to work on right now. You do not need to answer all the questions.

Exercise 1:

Answer the following questions to help you identify which strengths and weaknesses require your attention...

What knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes does your current role require?

What knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes does the role you would like to have require?

What immediate job goals do you want to work on?

What are you doing well that you want to do more of or do even better?

What have you been told by a superior that you need to work on?

What frustrates you about how you are?

What aspects of your work have the potential to significantly impact the mission and/or other people?

What aspects of your performance will likely derail your career if you do not improve, them?

Where do you have significant momentum forward that you can't afford to lose?

Step 1: Targeting Your Development

Now, it's time to review your responses to the questions on page 6 to identify the specific **areas to develop**. Review your answers and pay particular attention to items that are likely to provide the biggest benefit to you by correcting something that could have serious adverse consequences, strengthening something that could open up new opportunities, or achieving something that is an important goal for you.

You might find it helpful to find a quiet place to think about the following as you consider responses to the questions listed on the previous page.

What would others support me in developing?

What resources are available to me right now (time, money, staffing, training)?

Am I up to the challenge physically and emotionally?

How clearly can I envision the results that I would like to achieve?

Review your results from Exercise 1 and ask yourself:

What areas to develop stand out as important, realistically doable, and consistently noted by yourself and others?



In Box 2 of the IDP form, fill in your words to describe what you want to develop.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)		
(1) Leader's Name: Susan Daniels		
(2) Areas to Develop: - Improve my ability and willingness to really listen to and understand others' ideas. - Become more skilled in giving performance counseling to my subordinates.	(3) Supported Leader Competencies:	
(4) Desired Outcomes:	(5) Developmental Activities:	(6) Progress Indicators:
(7) Resources and Logistics Needed:		
References: IFR, FM 6-22, Self Development Handbook, Development Improvement Guide, VIC		

For **areas to develop** that come from your MSAF Individual Feedback Report, identify the competencies that correspond to the specific reported behaviors you want to develop. If you wrote areas to develop in your own words, review FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, and find competencies that relate to your areas to develop. For example, the area “*Become more skilled in giving performance counseling to my subordinates*” relates to the Develops Others competency.

In Box 3 of the IDP form, write the competencies you identify. FM 6-22 is a guide that clearly lays out the specific attributes and skills required for Army leaders. Though there may or may not be a direct link between what you decide to focus on in your IDP and the competencies spelled out in the FM 6-22, it can be helpful to identify one or two competencies that are related to your areas for development in order to access resources and materials that have been created by the Army and organized by competency. For example, the Army *Leader Developmental Improvements Guide* is a resource that provides recommendations, organized by the FM 6-22 competencies, that you can use for your personal development.


Step 2: Desired Outcomes

*"Our thoughts create our reality—where we put our focus is the **direction** we tend to go."*
-Peter McWilliams

Good development planning "starts with the end in mind" (Stephen Covey). Starting with the end in mind means stating the desired results and working backward to determine, "what will enable the results?" You can do this by listing one or two outcomes for each of your areas to develop.

A **desired outcome** is an accomplishment that signals attainment of some developmental gain—a step toward satisfaction of one of your areas to develop. The outcome should be appropriate for your situation and written in your own words. An outcome is a tangible result of improving the areas to develop you identified in Box 2. The desired outcome answers the question: *How will you know you have improved in this area?*

The purpose of Step 2 is to complete Box 4 of the IDP form by listing outcomes for your development plan.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)		
(1) Leader's Name: Susan Daniels		
(2) Areas to Develop: - Improve my ability and willingness to really listen to and understand others' ideas. - Become more skilled in giving performance counseling to my subordinates.		(3) Supported Leader Competencies: - Communicates - Develops Others
(4) Desired Outcomes:	(5) Developmental Activities:	(6) Progress Indicators:
		
(7) Resources and Logistics Needed:		
References: IFR, FM 6-22, Self Development Handbook, Development Improvement Guide, VIC		

TIP

Some areas to develop will require an ongoing effort that is made up of a series of accomplished outcomes over time. To record this types of development process on your IDP form, sequence the activities and put the first couple of desired outcomes on the IDP form. As you accomplish these outcomes, you will replace them with follow-on outcomes and activities to achieve them.

Step 2: Desired Outcomes

Below are some questions to help you clarify outcomes for your development efforts.

Exercise 2:

Consider the items you wrote in Box 2, Areas to Develop, and answer one, some, or all of the questions below to help in defining successful outcomes.

If I successfully develop my abilities with _____ [insert area to develop here] _____, it would look like...

Others would notice _____ because of this improvement.

Success with this area to develop would be measured by _____.

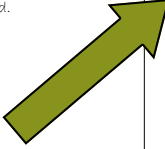
Step 3: Developmental Activities

"All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work"
-Calvin Coolidge

Box 5 asks for specific **developmental activities** that will lead to the outcomes you developed in Box 4. Developmental activities answer the question: *How are you going to achieve the outcome?*

The purpose of Step 3 is to complete Box 5 on the IDP form.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)		
(1) Leader's Name: Susan Daniels		
(2) Areas to Develop: - Improve my ability and willingness to really listen to and understand others' ideas. - Become more skilled in giving performance counseling to my subordinates.		(3) Supported Leader Competencies: - Communicates - Develops Others
(4) Desired Outcomes: - At the end of a conversation, I am able to accurately summarize the other person's points. - I am able to get through all the steps of counseling without becoming side-tracked.	(5) Developmental Activities:	(6) Progress Indicators:
(7) Resources and Logistics Needed:		
References: IFR, FM 6-22, Self Development Handbook, Development Improvement Guide, VIC		



There are three types of developmental activities:

- **Feedback** is an opportunity to gain information from others about how well you are doing. Feedback can include direct feedback from others, your own observations, analysis of response patterns, and acknowledgement of outcomes.
- **Study** provides a foundation of knowledge, principles, and concepts. Study can include attending training courses, reading books or articles, watching movies, observing others on the job, and analyzing various sources of information.
- **Practice** provides activities to convert your learning into action. Practice includes engaging in physical exercises, "walk throughs," drills, teamwork, etc.

Step 3: Developmental Activities

TIP

The *Leader Developmental Improvements (LDI) Guide* provides Feedback, Study, and Practice activities for each leader component identified in FM 6-22.

The following is a list of different types of developmental activities for you to consider when completing Box 5. When selecting and refining developmental activities, remember that the key is to find activities that will lead to your desired outcomes while still being doable, given your current situation.

Feedback	Ask for concrete input...	From others about how you are doing with specific issues and areas of performance.
	Gain support...	From peers, colleagues, friends, or other people who can partner with you by giving you encouragement or recognizing your success.
	Consult...	With friends, bosses, peers, subordinates, coaches, mentors, or other professionals who can give advice on your strengths or areas of concern.
Study	Observe...	Other leaders, professionals, and similar organizations and note leadership behaviors, traits, attributes, and attitudes that are most/least effective.
	Make time to reflect on...	Alternative perspectives regarding an issue that looks at both the big picture and details.
	Read...	Books, articles, manuals, and professional publications.
	Investigate...	A topic through internet or library searches, inquiry, gathering or asking questions, and soliciting information and materials from others.
Practice	Try...	A skill or behavior that needs improvement in a work situation or away from the unit.
	Participate in training...	Including Army schools, unit training programs, outside seminars, degree programs, and professional certifications.
	Teach...	A skill you are learning to someone else.
	Accept an on-the-job opportunity...	That stretches your abilities, such as giving presentations, teaching classes, volunteering for special duty assignments, assuming “acting” positions, job cross-training, and representing the boss at meetings.
	Explore off-the-job applications...	Such as joining or leading community groups, trying a new skill in a volunteer organization, or giving presentations to schools and civic organizations.

Step 3: Developmental Activities

Identifying the Right Activity

Exercise 3:

Once you have defined your desired outcomes for the specific leader components you want to develop, you need to identify the developmental activities that will lead to those outcomes. In deciding which activities to take on, you might consider:

In order to achieve the desired result I identified, I need to be able to...

That will require that I learn about or practice...

The best ways for me to learn about or get the practice I need is to....

That learning and practice can best be accomplished by...

Step 3: Developmental Activities

Though competition is often a strong motivator with improvement efforts, individual development planning is not a competitive sport. Pick developmental activities based on your personal needs. Remember to describe developmental activities in a way that will resonate with how you will improve.

There is no perfect science to picking the right developmental activities. Some developmental activities might address more than one outcome and some outcomes might require more than one developmental activity. Consider what it will take to achieve the desired outcomes, whether it is one developmental activity or a few.

You also may not identify the right activity at first. The important thing is to stick to it, noticing what works and what more you need to do to move your development towards your identified outcomes, and remain flexible to alternatives that might work better.

The next section will guide you in identifying a way to monitor your progress.

TIP

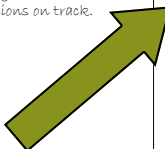
The *Army Self-Development Handbook* provides useful tips on how to identify your learning style, match it with activities, and get the most out of a learning opportunity. The *Leader Developmental Improvements (LDI) Guide* also provides useful suggestions for identifying developmental activities.

Step 4: Progress Indicators

Now that you have decided what you want to develop and how you are going to work on it, it can be helpful to find a way to monitor progress. Box 6 asks you to consider indicators that suggest what is working and what might need to change as you work on your development activities.

The purpose of Step 4 is to complete Box 6 on the IDP form.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)		
(1) Leader's Name: <i>Susan Daniels</i>		
(2) Areas to Develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Improve my ability and willingness to really listen to and understand others' ideas.- Become more skilled in giving performance counseling to my subordinates.		(3) Supported Leader Competencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Communicates- Develops Others
(4) Desired Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- At the end of a conversation, I am able to accurately summarize the other person's points.- I am able to get through all the steps of counseling without becoming sidetracked.	(5) Developmental Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Read about active listening methods.- Use active listening in conversations I have at work and home.- Analyze past counseling sessions to identify how they got sidetracked.- Use a written counseling plan to keep counseling sessions on track.	(6) Progress Indicators:
(7) Resources and Logistics Needed:		
References: IFR, FM 6-22, Self Development Handbook, Development Improvement Guide, VIC		



You might consider the following to help you identify progress indicators:

What would improvement look like, and how might I measure it?

Who can I ask for feedback?

What is a realistic time table or deadline for this activity?

TIP

Stick with it. Progress can be inconsistent. Sometimes it might seem like things are getting worse before they improve. It can be useful to think of ways to stay motivated with development activities.

Step 5: Resources and Logistics Needed

One thing that can hang up a well thought out development plan is not having the resources in place to make it all happen. Box 7 asks you to fill in specific logistics and resources that will allow you to do the activities you named so that you know exactly what you need to do to follow through.

The purpose of Step 5 is to complete Box 7 on the IDP form.

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(4) Desired Outcomes: - At the end of a conversation, I am able to accurately summarize the other person's points. - I am able to get through all the steps of counseling without becoming side-tracked.	(5) Developmental Activities: - Read about active listening methods. - Use active listening in conversations I have at work and home. - Analyze past counseling sessions to identify how they got sidetracked. - Use a written counseling plan to keep counseling sessions on track.		(6) Progress Indicators: - During conversations others indicate that I understand their points. - During performance counseling I am able to re-focus the conversation when the counselee becomes defensive or argumentative.
(7) Resources and Logistics Needed:			
References: IFR, FM 6-22, Self Development Handbook, Development Improvement Guide, VIC			

What are the materials, such as books, articles, and videos that I will need to start this activity? How can I get those materials?

Do I need facilities or equipment? How can I locate and get use of them?

Who do I need to connect with to carry out the activity?

What is my schedule for carrying out the activity?

Do I need feedback from others, how should I request that, of whom, and when?

Glossary

Competencies are sets or clusters of knowledge, skills, abilities, or other attributes required for performance of a role, function, or activity. The *Army Leadership* field manual (FM 6-22) identifies eight core leader competencies. These competencies are:

- Leads others
- Extends influence beyond the chain of command
- Leads by example
- Communicates
- Creates a positive environment
- Prepares self
- Develops others
- Gets results

Desired Outcome is a clearly defined, concrete outcome of your development process.

Developmental Activities are the specific actions of feedback, study, or practice you identify and undertake as part of the development process.

Leader (Leadership) Components are sub-elements of leader competencies. There are 56 components described in FM 6-22.